Valuing diversity in universities: institutional value statements and the reality of student intakes

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Many of the universities in England publicise statements of their values, separately from other mission statements, aims or goals. This paper compares universities whose value statements contain direct references to diversity, inclusion or equality, with those that do not and seeks to explore whether such values are reflected in these institutions student intakes. Although a relatively broad-brush approach, by focusing on the characteristics of student bodies (in terms of ethnicity, disability, and prior background in terms of school type attended and local area) the paper shows that in general there are minimal differences according to whether a university publically claims to value diversity according to available quantitative data.

Keywords: diversity; values; equality; ethnicity; disability

Introduction

Diversity, equality and inclusion have long been held up as important, if not vital, values to pursue within the university sector in the UK – dating back at least as far as the Robbins Report of 1963, whose rhetoric around widening participation was predicated on the notion of equality of opportunity. In policy terms, the Dearing Report of 1997 emphasised the importance of increasing diversity within the student bodies of institutions, particularly noting the under-representation of certain groups; and more recently, in passing the Higher Education and Research Act (2017), the government have mandated the Office for Students (OfS) to 'promote equality of opportunity' across the higher education sector (Connell-Smith & Hubble 2018, 7). Meanwhile, McLaughlin et al. have suggested that 'a rich body of literature from researchers and higher education organisations articulates the benefits of diversity' (2015, 223) and Kimura argues that equality and diversity has 'become an issue that universities cannot ignore' if they want to attract both students and staff (2014, 524), particularly in the context of increasing globalisation and marketisation.

This paper explores the diversity of student bodies in universities in England. In particular it makes comparisons between institutions whose public value statements prioritise diversity against those that do not. The paper aims to establish whether universities which explicitly promote diversity, inclusion and equality within their values can be shown to have more diverse student bodies. It seeks to evaluate whether the act of publically declaring diversity to be important is matched by institutions' practice. While a range of stakeholders and researchers may be interested in these preliminary results it has particular relevance for university senior leaders with responsibility for value or mission statements and/or improving the diversity of an institution's students body and more generally widening access: acting as a prompt to consider the importance of translating value statements into measurable and visible outcomes.

According to Universities UK (UUK) 'the term "equality and diversity" describes an approach that values difference and treats each individual fairly and with dignity and respect' – this paper will focus on approaches by universities to value and promote differences within their student bodies and to provide an equality of opportunity to access. The term 'diversity' is often taken to refer to a whole range of differences – including ethnicities, genders, disabilities, and socio-economic backgrounds of entrants amongst others – and in addressing the provision of equal opportunities, universities must account for all such underrepresented groups. In their work on diversity in higher education, Bowl and Bathmaker discuss the 'non-traditional' student – recognising that such definitions vary by context and also temporally (2016).

While the purpose of value statements for universities (and subsequently the purpose of including diversity within such statements) is difficult to ascertain given the,

relative, lack of research into their development and creation to-date, it could be surmised that they are likely to fulfil a variety of roles:

> Value statements for universities might play a role in terms of their marketing and appeal to (primarily) students, while recognising that they might also represent the facets of higher education which individual institutions genuinely believe to be the most important. By setting out their own institutional values an organisation might be better placed to inculcate those values in their students (ANONYMOUS).

Higher education institutions' mission, value or diversity statements are often portrayed as an opportunity for organisations to both meet their diversity goals and to introduce such goals into their core strategy (e.g. Hurtado 2007; McLaughlin et al. 2015; HEFCE 2017):

> Writing documents that express a commitment to promoting race equality is now a central part of equality work…documents are taken up as signs of good performance, as expressions of commitment and as descriptions of organisations as ''being'' diverse (Ahmed 2007, 590)

Although such usage is criticised by Ahmed as working 'to conceal forms of racism when they get taken up in this way' (2007, 590).

Mission and value statements are a relatively ubiquitous feature of university strategy and publicity (see e.g. Saunston and Morrish 2010). Furthermore, Coleman et al. have noted that many institutions have adopted the pursuit of a diverse student body as a core educational goal (2004).While a previous paper has considered the reasons institutions adopt value statements in more depth (see ANONYMISED), here I will instead focus on the extent to which English institutions (as per Coleman et al. 2004) have explicitly adopted diversity, equality or inclusion as one of their values and subsequently how this matches up with their actual student intake.

Increasing diversity and equality of opportunity within universities could either be seen as a choice taken by institutions themselves and pursued for its benefits (e.g. in

order to allow them to compete for new students); or as a requirement that institutions must meet as part of the access agreements/access and participation plans they formerly made with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and now make with the Office for Students (OfS). Such plans are required for providers to charge the higher rate of fees (which are commonplace in England) and as such are one way that the government regulates and incentivises institutions to diversify their student bodies. McCaig and Adnett have analysed these access agreements in the past, proposing that they show the higher education system in England to be divided along binary lines, between 'selecting' (or 'old') and 'recruiting' (or 'new') universities (2009). Furthermore, Bowl and Hughes, whose work follows similar lines, surmise that:

> Selecting institutions are able to take their pick of the highest achieving applicants, using statements about widening participation primarily as a marketing tool to soften their image. In contrast, the newer 'recruiting' universities are seen as reliant on widening participation to maintain student numbers. (Bowl and Hughes 2016, 271)

Bowl and Hughes' analysis of agreements from eight institutions suggested that the historical and cultural context of institutions was a significant factor when it came to the construction of such agreements (2016). It should be noted that access and participation plans are 'focused on groups underrepresented in higher education' and as such are distinct from equality and diversity provision – however, in its guidance for universities, OfS obliges institutions to provide 'an explanation of the interaction between your access and participation plan and your equality and diversity strategy' (2018, 25). Similarly, diversity can be seen as an inevitable by-product of provision for open access and widening participation – as underrepresented groups are better represented. As noted in the above guidance, many universities have specific diversity, or equality and diversity statements and as research by (ANONYMISED) and Altıntaş & Kavurmacı (2018) has shown, diversity is often a key feature of universities' mission and value

statements too. However, in contrast to the regulated nature of access and participation plans, such statements have the potential to be less hard-edged: there is no inherent accountability built into their creation. As Kimura goes on to ask:

> The question is whether by just claiming their commitment to equality and diversity in institutional policy documents, universities actually do promote (racial) equality and diversity. Has the existence of these documents made institutions free from racism and more socially inclusive? (Kimura 2014, 529)

Table 1 shows the current, and recent, characteristics of students in UK higher education (restricted to full-time, undergraduate students). As can be seen, there has been a shift in recent years towards greater diversity in terms of both ethnicity and disability status, with increasing percentages of minority groups represented. There are more women participating in higher education than men, with the disparity between genders continuing to widen (although it should be noted that women were under-represented in the sector until 1992 (Broekce & Hamed 2008)) and there has been a slight shift away from older students.

Table 1: Student characteristics (percentage of full-time undergraduate students at all UK institutions by sex, age group, disability status and ethnicity). (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) 2018)

This student characteristic data suggests that, in some areas at least, the student bodies of UK higher education institutions are becoming more diverse and underrepresented groups are increasing, although Archer warns against complacency in viewing admissions as the end-point for universities that wish to truly value and promote diversity:

> The achievement of a more diverse population of students entering higher education does not straightforwardly equate with the achievement of equitable forms of participation … an unevenness persists with regard to who studies what and where. (Archer 2007, 646)

In UK policy the discourse around diversifying student bodies has been characterised by its focus on widening participation and access, the last twenty years of which is well documented by Harrison (2018, 59). While this discourse is relatively broad in reach and the access agreements that institutions are required to write and commit to (see above) encompass many facets, one of the key concepts to emerge has been that of 'low participation neighbourhoods' or LPNs:

> These are geographically defined areas that are calculated to have a lower-than-average propensity to send young people into higher education, based on historic official data. These LPNs have grown in policy importance in recent years and have come to dominate many aspects of targeting, monitoring and funding (both personal and institutional) (Harrison & McCaig 2015, 794).

This focus allows for a relatively straightforward classification of students (utilising their postcode to identify whether they are from such a neighbourhood) but is also problematic, not least because of the lack of granularity involved. LPNs have formed a key part of policy (including their use in access agreements) and as such universities may seek to recruit from particular neighbourhoods which inevitably contain a broad spectrum of inhabitants (many of whom may not be 'disadvantaged' in the sense intended) (Harrison & McCaig 2015, 813). This highlights one of the many inconsistencies in policy, as well as the complexity of understanding why universities might seek to diversify their student body and how this can be measured (as per below, low participation neighbourhoods are one of the measures adopted in this paper, but should be viewed in conjunction with the other measures rather than in isolation).

It should be noted that staff diversity is an important concern alongside student diversity, and, as will be seen later in this paper, universities' references to diversity often include both students and staff. However, given that they are related but distinct issues, with distinct challenges, I will chiefly concentrate on student diversity and opportunity here, comparing university claims (as set out through their public value

statements) with the reality of student data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

The following section in this paper explains the methodology in greater detail, followed by a results section which outlines some examples of value statements, along with student characteristic data for the included universities. The paper concludes with a discussion section, which considers the fundamental question of whether universities which profess to value diversity and equality of opportunity can be seen to be meeting such values.

Method

This paper is based upon the publically available value statements of English universities – specifically comparing those universities which include diversity and equality of opportunity within such value statements and those that do not. The following sections describe in greater detail the sample and data collection process, along with the method of analysis used to compare such statements with available quantitative data on student bodies.

Data collection and sample

At the point of data collection there were 109 English universities and university colleges (HEFCE 2017b) which represented the sample for this project. A search of the websites (in August 2017) of all 109 universities identified 77 which listed value statements. In case of doubt, and to differentiate these statements from other common proclamations, such as mission statements, universities' own definitions were always used (i.e. when there were multiple lists or statements under different headings, those that the university in question described as 'values' were used). In order to further refine the sample and make comparisons based upon publically declared values, the value statements were then coded according to their content (further details can be found in

ANONYMISED):

- 77 universities published value statements which were easily accessible during the data collection phase of 2017
- 51 mentioned concepts initially coded as 'diversity' or 'equality of opportunity'
- 42 specifically referenced equality, diversity or inclusivity, within their institution, of staff and students (student population data was available for all 42 of these institutions)
- 35 universities did not explicitly mention diversity in relation to their student body (of these, student population data was available for 29 institutions, the other 6 universities were generally specialist, and relatively small, institutions)
- Hence the final sample for this research was 71 universities: 42 of which explicitly valued diversity, equality and inclusion within their student body; and 29 of which did not.

Analysis

In order to compare the selected value statements with quantitative data on student intakes, a series of indicators have been selected – based on publically available statistical information, relevance, and in order to show sufficient breadth of diversity, as above. In particular, data on students' ethnicity, disability status, neighbourhood (as a measure of previous low-participation in higher education), and attendance at state school (as defined by HESA as non-independent schools – i.e. funded by the government and including academy schools, free schools, non-independent sixth-forms and further education colleges) has been collated for the 71 institutions that form the sample for this project. In order to maintain continuity across these different data sets, when possible, these have been restricted to UK domiciled, young, full-time, undergraduate entrants. Future research might consider other groups excluded from this

research, including staff (in particular staff in senior roles), postgraduate students, international students etc. in order to account for broader conceptions of diversity and equality of opportunity.

Data on student's educational background (whether they attended state school), residence prior to attendance (known as 'participation of local areas' data – POLAR3 and based on the proportion of the young population that participates in higher education from different neighbourhoods) and disability (whether or not they are in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)) is all derived from HESA data sources, and is compared with institutional benchmarks calculated by HESA. These benchmarks take into account a range of factors, including subject studied and entry qualifications (HESA 2019a) and where possible location benchmarks have also been included, which also take into account where a provider's students come from. HESA's guidance should be noted in use of this data, which prefers comparison between an institution's data and their benchmark to sectoral averages, but which also includes the following caveats:

> The benchmarks are not targets. They are average values which will change from one year to the next if the overall value of the characteristic changes. They are provided to give information about the sort of values that might be expected for a HE provider's indicator if no factors other than those allowed for were important. The corollary of this is that where differences do exist, this may be due to the HE provider's performance, or it may be due to some other factor which is not included in the benchmark. (HESA 2019a)

Only statistically significant differences are identified between an institution's performance and their benchmark.

In the case of ethnicity data, no benchmarks are set by HESA and as such a different approach has been adopted. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) publishes data on who the characteristics of applicants to British universities and the offers made in response. While this data is distinct from the HESA data above,

in that it identifies the type of people who apply and who get made an offer to study at university, it does not directly represent the actual students who go on to study. However, as UCAS note, it does have some benefits in that it reflects a process for which universities have sole responsibility:

> The offer-making stage is important when looking at the different groups at a provider, because it is the one stage of the process that is in the direct control of the provider itself (UCAS 2019a).

UCAS make available (at an institutional level) the percentage point difference between an institution's average offer rate and the offer rate of different ethnic groups. As above, only when those differences are deemed (by UCAS) to be significant are they highlighted below. In response to analysis by the website WonkHE, Nottingham Trent University have previously argued that differential offer rates can be explained by would-be students from certain ethnic backgrounds having different types of qualification (Kerrigan 2017) and, as with the analysis of HESA data, this paper does not present the findings as definitive proof that universities act in certain ways or according to either explicit or implicit priorities. However, as the primary aim of the work is to compare those institutions that explicitly value diversity and inclusion to those that do not, it could be argued that regardless of qualifying factors (such as different types of qualification) a university which claims to prioritise diversity could be expected to be more likely to offer places to ethnic minority groups. In all cases summaries of the data is displayed in tables 2-5 below.

Importantly, I would warn against judging individual institutional performance – my analysis, below, is concerned with more general trends, either among the entire cohort of 42 institutions, or within smaller sub-groups (e.g. the Russell Group institutions represented). I advise such caution at least partly because a) providers may only have recently adopted the value statement on which they are being judged (perhaps

directly in response to performing poorly on such measures, in order to provide a call to action) and b) individual statistics may be misleading when taken in isolation and don't necessarily take into account specific contextual factors which may be relevant as per HESA (2019a) above. Instead, the analysis that follows is concerned with wider trends or patterns in terms of the performance of universities that say they prioritise diversity and equality.

While the statistics selected allow for a broad overview of improvements in equality of opportunity (as measured by greater representation of traditionally underrepresented groups) McLaughlin et al. have discussed the problems associated with traditional measures of magnitude and proportion used to represent diversity and the lack of detail provided by these (2015). Such problems should be borne in mind when considering these results and McLaughlin et al.'s proposals for better measures of diversity are considered in greater detail in the discussion section below.

It should be noted that the value statements presented in this paper were gathered in 2017 and, given the nature of planning and strategy within the sector, some universities may have adopted or publicised differing positions since then.

Results

The following section illustrates what diversity and equality of opportunity look like in university value statements, with some examples from the corpus of statements, and is followed by four tables which present the statistical information detailing the performance of the sampled universities in relation to the representation of certain groups within their student bodies. Each table is followed by a brief account of the key findings.

Many of the universities' value statements talked about diversity specifically in terms of their staff and student body, with a particular focus on the creation, promotion or development of a diverse community:

> A multi-culturally diverse community in which staff and students continue to learn from, and celebrate, individual differences. (Aston University)
> We're committed to developing and nurturing a diverse community that supports not only inclusion in the university but through the impact of our activities in local, national and international communities. We champion and nurture inclusivity, diversity and equality to the highest levels, recognising the value it has to the future of our students, staff, partners and community. (University of Brighton)

Other value statements focused on the slightly less tangible concept of 'celebrating diversity':

> We respect and celebrate diversity and equal opportunity through an inclusive culture. (University of Portsmouth)
> Generous: We respect and celebrate diversity. (University of Westminster)

Some statements, at least in part, concentrated on inclusivity and on the equality of opportunities that their approach provided:

> We will be inclusive and provide equal opportunities for all. (University of York)
> Inclusive: We play a unique role in society, making higher education open to all. (The Open University)

What was noticeable however, throughout the whole body of statements (or sets of statements, as some institutions had multiple values listed which were all categorised as relating to diversity and equality), were the similarities between so many of them. Key words or phrases such as 'celebrate diversity/difference' (seven occurrences); 'community' (14 occurrences); or 'respect' (17 occurrences) cropped up repeatedly (in addition to the terms diversity, equality and inclusion which appeared at least once in each statement).

Table 2: Performance of universities in comparison to HESA benchmarks for proportion of students from **state schools or colleges**, UK domiciled young full-time undergraduate entrants 2016/17 (HESA 2019b).

Table 2 shows the performance of universities in relation to the proportion of their

students which have come from state schools. Non-state school pupils are more likely to be accepted into higher education than state school pupils (Sutton Trust 2011) – a finding that is exacerbated at the most selective institutions. As can be seen, in relation to their benchmarks relatively few universities' performance either exceeded or fell significantly below expectation, although when location benchmark is considered those institutions that did prioritise values were more likely to exceed their benchmark.

Table 3: Performance of universities in comparison to HESA benchmarks for proportion of students from **low participation neighbourhoods** (based on POLAR3), UK domiciled young full-time undergraduate entrants 2016/17 (HESA 2019b).

Table 3 is based on participation of local areas (POLAR3) data – which categorises students according to where they come from, and the average rate of participation in higher education in that area – it shows the percentage of students at each institution that come from the fifth (lowest) quintile – in other words the group of students least likely to participate in higher education. Again, the differences between groups when compared against standard benchmarks were relatively minimal, while those universities that prioritised diversity were more likely to exceed their location benchmark.

Table 4: Comparison of universities percentage of offers made to different **ethnic groups** in relation to individual institutions' average offer rate – highlighting those that fall outside of the 'likely range of uncertainty' as defined by UCAS (2019a), 18 year-old June 2018 applications (UCAS 2019b).

Based on UCAS data, Table 4 shows the performance of universities in terms of offers made to different ethnic groups – it is based on the June applications of 18 year olds and the percentage point difference between offer rate and average offer (which shows how the offer rate differs from the offer rate that would be expected, as given by the average offer rate statistic for each institution (UCAS 2019a)). The universities highlighted in

Table 4 are those whose percentage point difference (for any given ethnic group) is outside of the 'range of uncertainty' – defined by UCAS as readings which meet a threshold of confidence that the difference:

> Represents a real difference between the offer rate and what might be expected after controlling for predicted grades and subject choice. In these cases, it may be that the difference can be explained by other factors not accounted for by the average offer rate, for example performance at interview, subject of predicted qualifications and relevance to the course applied to, the exact profile of the predicted grades, personal statement, teacher references, or any other criteria (such as work experience of portfolios) that may be part of the admissions decision (UCAS 2019a).

As can be seen in Table 4, in general while the raw numbers are similar, those universities that did not explicitly prioritise diversity in their value statements were less likely to make offers to students whose ethnicity was defined as Black, Asian or Other, and were more likely to make offers to students defined as White.

Table 5: Performance of universities in comparison to HESA benchmarks for proportion of students receiving **Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA)**, UK domiciled full-time undergraduates 2016/17 (HESA 2019c).

Table 5 shows the number and percentage of institutions that either exceeded or fell below their benchmark in terms of proportion of students attending who received DSA. The comparison between institutions that did (and did not) prioritise diversity in their value statements shows that there is virtually no difference in terms of incidence rate – with those that did prioritise it very marginally more likely to exceed their benchmark than those that did not.

Discussion

One of the questions which comes to the fore in any discussion around university value statements, and is particularly pertinent when comparing such statements with the

reality of institutions' student bodies, is 'what is the purpose of such statements in the first place?' Similarly, such a discussion prompts one to consider whether value statements are created aspirationally – to provide a target or goal for an institution to aim for; or whether they are adopted to reflect something a university already does or to promote an area of strength. Such questions are fundamentally important to a paper such as this one, which compares value statements with available data to test whether universities can embody/are embodying their values in action – but whose method would be deeply unfair to universities that have adopted their values in order to channel their strategy towards areas identified as weaknesses. By extension, we can ask what does valuing diversity really mean for the wider sector, and for these institutions specifically? The very terms 'values' and 'diversity' are contested concepts – with differing definitions relating to how they are understood and what they mean in different contexts. For instance, challenging the premise of this paper, is it necessary for a student body to be diverse in order for a university to value diversity? Arguably an institution could be relatively homogenous and still value the concept of diversity.

Halualani et al. have argued that diversity must be understood holistically across an institution and in relation to a range of factors, which might include the behavioural climate and the institution's history of exclusion practices:

> What a higher education institution is actually doing by way of diversity (in all of its forms) needs to be examined in relation to the perceptions and experiences of diversity to balance the objective and subjective dimensions of a diversity climate. (Halualani et al. 2010, 128)

Such an approach was, inevitably, beyond the scope of this paper and highlights just how difficult it is to understand diversity on an individual-institutional basis.

Ahmed has discussed the inherent danger in taking value statements, (along with diversity or equality statements) purely on their merits in an environment in which

accountability is often treated as an exercise in audit, with such statements providing the 'evidence':

> So if diversity and equality were audited, then universities would be able to show they have gone through the right processes, whatever processes they actually have. In other words, you can become good at audit by producing auditable documents, which would mean the universities who 'did well' on race equality would be simply the ones that were good at creating auditable systems. (Ahmed 2007, 597)

Ahmed characterises the situation as one in which having 'good' policies around equality, diversity etc. is confused with, or regarded as synonymous to, the idea of being good at equality and diversity (Ahmed, 2007). They go on to critique the division between action and image management:

> The politics of diversity has become what we could call 'image management': diversity work is about generating the 'right image', and correcting the wrong one. (Ahmed 2007, 605)

As per Ahmed, (ANONYMISED) has highlighted the potential role of value statements to the marketing/publicity arm of universities' operation and in any discussion around their purpose one must remember that they stand as very public offerings – in many cases prominently displayed on university websites which are often aimed firmly towards the recruitment of new students.

Ultimately should we be questioning whether the very focus on diversity is beneficial for universities? Research has shown that minority groups on campus often feel alienated at university, even when part of a 'diverse' student body (Read et al., 2003) and Archer has gone on to criticise the ways in which the use of the concept of 'diversity' can actually act to mask underlying issues:

> 'Diversity' is being deployed within higher education policy in ways that (i) work to deny or detract away from structural and material inequalities, in keeping with an individualist, rationalistic neoliberal project; (ii) render particular bodies known

> and (ac)countable/thus enabling an audit-style approach to 'managing' diversity. (Archer 2007, 646-7)

Archer's comments echo those of Ahmed (2007) and present a somewhat bleak outlook. While we would expect universities who publically declare diversity and inclusion to be key parts of their value system to perform better than those that do not across the range of measures explored in this paper, in general there is little evidence to suggest this is the case. The basket of quantitative diversity measures (related to their student bodies) presents few differences between the two groups, and no clear and obvious strength amongst the former group, with only a relatively small proportion exceeding their benchmarks by a statistically significant amount (generally less than a quarter in terms of representation of state school pupils, students from low participation neighbourhoods and students from ethnic minorities).

The question of how to measure diversity remains an issue, one that McLaughlin et al. have discussed in depth, in particular addressing the problem that more inclusive practices can actually reduce diversity (e.g. recruiting more state school pupils, although they are already the dominant group at UK institutions) – highlighting tension between equality and diversity:

> Using Simpson's index of diversity and Sullivan's model to extend current educational practices of magnitude and proportion has several distinct advantages. First, it allows administrators to address the fact that larger proportions of a category may, in fact, reduce diversity. (McLaughlin et al. 2015, 227)

The statistics adopted in this paper are at times somewhat problematic, as has been previously acknowledged, and should be treated in the spirit of providing a new way to analyse universities' own value statements, rather than as a definitive measure of diversity across the institutions involved. Implementation of change takes time and without establishing how long the universities in the sample have professed to value diversity it is not necessarily fair to judge them all in the same way – as noted

previously it may be that some of the universities involved have adopted diversity and inclusion as a priority value precisely because they were not performing well against their benchmarks for such data.

Conclusions

While the purpose of university value statements is not necessarily clear (ANONYMISED) this paper has suggested that – at least in terms of diversity, inclusion and equality – there is little evidence that such statements have a demonstrable effect on an institution's behaviour or practice. Looking across a range of diversity measures, there was no clear connection between an institution mentioning diversity in their statements and a particularly diverse student body (across the broader sample – individual instances of excellent practice undoubtedly did exist, but not in enough numbers to suggest that the connection is sector-wide).

Of note through the analysis of such statements was the similarity between many of them, with key phrases repeatedly reappearing across the corpus of statements/sets of statements. This highlights an area for future discussion and study, in order to further explore the purpose of value statements and to question why there are so many similarities and so much conformity between statements. Furthermore, as evidenced in (ANONYMISED), diversity and equality are only one of a series of values that are adopted at a large proportion of English universities, and continuing to explore whether universities embody these other values might help to shed additional light on questions around the purpose and role played by such statements.

As Archer et al. have noted, there is a common discourse around typical or 'traditional' students in English higher education; and while some of these notions have begun to be eradicated (e.g. around gender) others (such as ethnicity and class background) persist (see Table 1):

> Even within institutions with high proportions of 'non-traditional' students, the culture of the academy predominantly reflects a discourse of the student as young, white, male and middle class. Students should be able to feel that they can 'belong' in any institution, but this will not happen until the elite universities are no longer the preserve of 'traditional' students (Archer et al. 2003, 197).

Universities should not be discouraged from seeking to diversify their student bodies and adopting diversity, equality and/or inclusion as one (or many) of their key values might represent an important public show of this. However, as this paper has demonstrated, such public expressions have not (at least in the short-term and for the majority) translated into distinctive performance by such institutions – either in comparison to their own individual benchmarks or in comparison to universities which do not adopt such values publically.

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HESA (2019b) Table T1 – Participation of under-represented groups in higher education 2016/17 to 2017/18 https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/ukpis/widening-participation/table-t1

HESA (2019c) Table T7 – Participation of students in higher education who are in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) 2016/17 to 2017/18 https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/ukpis/widening-participation/table-t7

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All value statements included in this paper were taken from university websites and were publicly available.

Tables

Category	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
(Sex)					
Female	55%	55%	55%	55%	56%
Male	45%	45%	45%	45%	44%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
(Age group)					
20 and under	61%	62%	63%	63%	63%
21-24 years	28%	28%	27%	27%	27%
25-29 years	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
30 years and over	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%
(Disability status)					
Known disability	10%	11%	12%	12%	13%
No known disability	90%	89%	88%	88%	87%
(Ethnicity)					
White	78%	78%	77%	76%	75%
Black	6%	7%	7%	7%	7%
Asian	11%	11%	11%	11%	12%
Other (including mixed)	5%	5%	5%	5%	6%

Table 1: Student characteristics (percentage of full-time undergraduate students at all UK institutions by sex, age group, disability status and ethnicity) (HESA 2018).

		Number in comparison to standard benchmark	Percentage of total	Number in comparison to location benchmark	Percentage of total
Included diversity in value statements (n=42)	Statistically significant difference above (+) benchmark	5	12%	9	21%
	As expected	34	81%	30	71%
	Statistically significant difference below (-) benchmark	3	7%	3	7%
Did not include diversity in value statements (n=29)	Statistically significant difference above (+) benchmark	5	17%	3	10%
	As expected	19	66%	22	76%
	Statistically significant difference below (-) benchmark	5	17%	4	14%

Table 2: Performance of universities in comparison to HESA benchmarks for proportion of students from **state schools or colleges**, UK domiciled young full-time undergraduate entrants 2016/17 (HESA 2019b).

		Number in comparison to standard benchmark	Percentage of total	Number in comparison to location benchmark	Percentage of total
Included diversity in value statements (n=42)	Statistically significant difference above (+) benchmark	11	26%	8	19%
	As expected	23	55%	32	76%
	Statistically significant difference below (-) benchmark	8	19%	2	5%
Did not include diversity in value statements (n=29)	Statistically significant difference above (+) benchmark	9	31%	4	14%
	As expected	14	48%	23	79%
	Statistically significant difference below (-) benchmark	6	21%	2	7%

Table 3: Performance of universities in comparison to HESA benchmarks for proportion of students from **low participation neighbourhoods** (based on POLAR3), UK domiciled young full-time undergraduate entrants 2016/17 (HESA 2019b).

		White		Black		Mixed		Asian		Other	
		Number	% of total	Number	% of total	Number	% of total	Number	% of total	Number	% of total
Included diversity in value statements (n=42)	Outside of the 'likely range of uncertainty' – above (+)	7	17%	1	2%	1	2%	2	5%	1	2%
	Within 'likely range of uncertainty'	34	81%	28	67%	40	95%	34	81%	37	88%
	Outside of the 'likely range of uncertainty' – below (-)	1	2%	13	31%	1	2%	6	14%	4	10%
Did not include diversity in value statements (n=29)	Outside of the 'likely range of uncertainty' – above (+)	8	28%	2	7%	0	0%	0	0%	1	3%
	Within 'likely range of uncertainty'	21	72%	14	48%	28	97%	22	76%	21	72%
	Outside of the 'likely range of uncertainty' – below (-)	0	0%	13	45%	1	3%	7	24%	7	24%

Table 4: Comparison of universities percentage of offers made to different ethnic groups in relation to individual institutions' average offer rate – highlighting those that fall outside of the 'likely range of uncertainty' as defined by UCAS (2019a), 18 year-old June 2018 applications (UCAS 2019b).

		Comparison in relation to benchmark	Percentage of total
Included diversity in value statements (n=42)	Above (+)	23	55%
	Below (-)	19	45%
Did not include diversity in value statements (n=29)	Above (+)	15	52%
	Below (-)	14	48%

Table 5: Performance of universities in comparison to HESA benchmarks for proportion of students receiving **Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA)**, UK domiciled full-time undergraduates 2016/17 (HESA 2019c). Please note, statistical significance information is not available in HESA datasets in relation to DSA benchmarks, meaning some of the institutions listed above/below their benchmark may have been only marginally so.